



Sioux City District

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Incorporating Sexual Violence Awareness and Prevention into Iowa's K-12 Sex Ed

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Position Statement:

It is the position of the Iowa Youth Congress, the voice of Iowa's youth, that sexual violence awareness and prevention education should be added to Iowa's K-12 sexual education curriculum.

Position:

This bill will assist in preventing instances of sexual violence by educating Iowa's K-12 students on subjects such as consent, empathy, healthy relationships, and setting boundaries in order to increase sexual violence awareness and prevention among Iowans. This bill will change Iowa's current sexual education policies to mandate the inclusion of information on sexual violence prevention and awareness.

Current Situation:

Currently in the United States, one in five women has been raped or has experienced an attempted rape and 81% of women have reported some form of sexual harassment and/or assault in their lifetime, while nearly a quarter of men has experienced some form of physical sexual violence with 43% men reporting experiencing some form of sexual harassment [1]. Although many reasons exist as to why sexual violence occurs, many experts agree that a fundamental factor in preventing sexual violence is receiving proper education. Even though Iowa schools are required to teach sexual education, the curriculum is mandated only to be age-appropriate, science-based, and include information on the prevention and control of sexually-transmitted diseases. It is necessary to learn about these important factors, however, these requirements fail to include any information on consent.

Iowans aren't alone when it comes to concern about the quality of sex education. Data from a nationwide survey shows that most people think very little is being done to educate high school students on sexual assault [2]. This correlates to data that shows that few people in the United States received education from either school or their parents about how to give consent, ask for consent, say no to sex,

and how to recognize whether your partner is giving consent. If they did receive such education, the focus was usually on simply saying “no” or dealing with sexual assault after the fact [2]. While this type of education is important, experts agree that effective sexual violence prevention education goes beyond consent, and includes teachings on topics such as communicating and respecting boundaries [3]. Other researchers say education on forming healthy relationships could minimize instances of sexual harassment in middle and high school [4]. Unfortunately, Iowa’s current sexual education curriculum lacks this type of education.

Rationale:

No shortage of research backs up the claim that proper sex education prevents sexual violence. A recent study from Columbia University suggests that comprehensive sexual education protects students from sexual assault even after high school. The research found that students who received formal education about how to say no to sex [5] before age 18 were less likely to experience penetrative sexual assault in college [4].

While numbers regarding older teens who have received sexual violence prevention education are promising, this education must precede college campuses and high school students. The Centers for Disease Control reports that over 42% of women who experienced sexual violence were first raped before the age of 18 [6]. Thus, sexual violence prevention must start sooner rather than later. Additionally, this modification will include teaching potential perpetrators not to assault and bystanders to not turn a blind eye to assault. Iowa schools are currently required to begin teaching sexual education in grades seven or eight, and then continue this education at some point during grades nine through twelve. However, experts say that sexual health education should begin in elementary school with topics such as the human body, puberty, empathy, and healthy relationships [7]. Other experts claim that sex education should begin with simple anatomy lessons during the toddler years [8]. The story of Angie Lauritsen, a victim of child sexual abuse, highlights the importance of this. Lauritsen explains that when she was raped by a family member, she had no education to help her understand that she was being sexually assaulted, and therefore could not protect herself. She explains that “The process of teaching young kids their body parts is protective, not sexualizing” [9]. Additionally, one study found that some sex offenders avoid children who know the correct names for their genitals, which suggests these children have been educated about body safety and sexuality [10]. A child is sexually assaulted in the US every nine minutes [9]. If sexual violence education is to be implemented, it must be implemented now. Through the implementation of sexual violence awareness education, educational institutions will be well-informed about the standards that should be upheld when investigating and resolving sexual harassment claims.

In addition to its physical and emotional effects, sexual violence is also associated with high financial costs. Rape costs an estimated \$122,000 per victim. There are about 25 million rape survivors in the US right now, meaning we can expect to spend more than \$3 trillion over their lifetimes on health

care, criminal justice response, lost productivity, and other costs [6]. As sexual violence prevention education reduces instances of rape, this added curriculum will end up reducing the overall cost of rape to the economy as well as the state and national government. Therefore, funding this curriculum is a cost-effective investment.

Recommended Action:

The Iowa Youth Congress supports modifying Iowa Law 279.50 “Human Growth and Development Instruction” to mandate the inclusion of sexual violence awareness and prevention education into Iowa’s current K-12 sexual education curriculum. This added curriculum would start in elementary school with topics such as naming and identifying parts of the body, establishing and respecting boundaries, and the importance of empathy. The curriculum would extend to middle school and high school with additional education on how to give and recognize proper consent, identify predatory behavior, healthy versus unhealthy sexual relationships, and tips on preventing or intervening in a potential assault.

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